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A Narrative Research Approach For Life Writings Of Specially Challenged

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Abstract: The specially-abled in the Indian context have been penalized since the ancient times to the contemporary present for a bodily defect. The research aims at investigating the practices and policies of society and government in breaking the barriers of discrimination to bring these marginalised to the centre. Select life writings of specially-abled Indians who were either born with disability or fatally reduced to such state will be studied. This paper focuses on the importance of utilizing a theoretical framework for a research study and discusses narrative theory as a framework for the qualitative research on Self versus Society in the life writings of specially-abled Indians.

Key words: narrative theory, autobiography, authorised biography, memoir, Specially-abled.

Introduction:

A researcher aims at disseminating/exploiting the existing knowledge to reach the unknown and unexplored knowledge for personal, professional and social concerns. He needs to delve into the vast horizon of knowledge related to his topic, collaborate, participate, investigate and communicate his ideas of newly found knowledge. In the process of research “the theoretical framework serves as the structure and support for the rationale, for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions ... providing a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review, and most importantly, the methods and analysis¹. Lysaght (2011) highlighted the necessity of identifying one’s theoretical framework for a dissertation study:

A researcher’s choice of framework is not arbitrary but reflects important personal beliefs and understandings about the nature of knowledge, how it exists (in the metaphysical sense) in relation to the observer, and the possible roles to be adopted, and tools to be employed consequently, by the researcher in his/her work. (p.572)

Mertens acknowledged that the theoretical framework “has implications for every decision made in the research process”² (1998, p. 3), which emphasises that the theoretical framework for a research must be selected at the beginning of the research work. Cynthia Grant states that researcher’s choice of a theory provides structure to the entire thesis. The theory selected for the study offers a theoretical base for understanding, analysing, and designing ways to investigate a problem,³ therefore choosing an appropriate theoretical frame work (which refers to the choice of theories) in the initial stage of research is obligatory and it must be specified and explicitly stated for comprehensive research.

Application of Theory

Research Topic – Self versus Society in Select Life Writings of Specially-abled Indians

The first step ‘to frame’ an appropriate theory to the research work is to identify:

Research Problem: The struggle of specially challenged continues even now in spite of Government policies towards inclusive society.

Research Objective: To consider life writings of differently abled as a social document to investigate the lapses in implementation of inclusive policies and practices.

Research Question: How to bring awareness about the need of inclusive practises and policies to empower the specially challenged?

The present research which involves investigation of the practices and policies of society and government for inclusion of the specially challenged in the contemporary society chooses qualitative research methodology. Hence it is necessary to collect the narrative account of differently abled experiences which are found in the life writings of specially-abled. The life writings which express their struggle for human connections are candid and their honest narrations provide an eye-opening experience to the readers making them know what it is like to have grown up with disability.

The Theory of Narratology or Narrative

Narratology is the study of narrative and narrative structure and the ways that these affect our perception.⁴ It is an anglicisation of French *narratologie*, coined by Tzvetan Todorov (*Grammaire du Décaméron*, 1969). Its theoretical lineage is traceable to Aristotle (*Poetics*) but modern narratology is agreed to have begun with the Russian Formalists, particularly Vladimir Propp (*Morphology of the Folktale*, 1928), and Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of hetero-glossier, dialogism, and the chronoscope first presented in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975).

Narrative is defined as “a vital human activity which structures experience and gives it meaning”⁵. Narrative can be seen as a way of structuring and organizing new experiences and knowledge by constructing knowledge and making it more learnable⁶. Studying narrative is a way of studying the ways humans experience the world⁷. Narrative inquiry is both a phenomenon and a method where people tell their stories; narrative researchers explain such experiences by collecting stories and writing narratives of them⁸. Storyteller speaks and declares life as experiences in a narrative form that is called story⁹. Thus, the researcher can have first-hand narration of the experiences in the life-writings of specially challenged.

The Reason and Context for Using Narrative

The specially-abled people are marginalized in the society due to their developmental disabilities. Select life-writings of specially-abled Indians who were either born with disability or fatally reduced to such state will be examined. The research involves investigation of the unique experiences of differently abled in India and the role of poverty, gender, caste and community in compounding the marginalization felt by people with disabilities. They have served as an undying inspiration and motivation for others. The research aims at exploring the social barriers and the need of practicing inclusive society. Their physical, emotional, social and financial needs will be an integral part of the study, exploring - their struggles and success. Polkinghorne (1988) states that the narrative approach is the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite.

Structure of Narratives

Labov W in his essay “Some Further Steps in Narrative Analysis” states that each narrative has formal properties, and a complete narrative has six key components:

1. An abstract (summary of the narrative);
2. Orientation (time, place, situation, participants);
3. Complicating action (sequence of events);
4. Evaluation (significance and meaning of the action, attitude of the narrator);
5. Resolution (what finally happened)
6. Coda (returns to the present).

Methodology – Narrative Analysis

The literary texts selected for the research on Self versus Society in the life-writings of specially challenged are suitable for narrative analysis as they are based on subjectivity and identity. The analysis would focus on the “how” of lived experience and the casual “why”, analysis is framed interactional and attempts to unravel the multiple meanings that derive from the interactional events while simultaneously seeking to examine the social context presented in the personal narrative.¹⁰

The narrative analysis also allows the researcher to study the literary texts in the light of Marx Criticism to comprehend the attitude of bourgeois or upper class, their self-indulgence and callousness towards the oppressed class or proletariat.

Conclusion

The Narrative theoretical framework facilitates the researcher to approach the literary texts in a holistic way by merging Historical approach, Marxism and Feminism. Information can be gathered from multiple dimensions as the theoretical framework selected for the research allows synergising the relatedness between interdependencies. “The narrative scheme serves as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole”. (Barry & Elmes 1997, p.3)

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